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THE BRITISH NOVEL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

HOWEVER much we hear of the novel, and however much we read the novel, and however great the names of the novelists of the nineteenth century undoubtedly are, yet I believe—and I trust it is no great heresy—that the spirit of poetry and prophecy has most clearly caught and sounded the century's thought and aspiration. Matthew Arnold's words still remain true: "Supremacy is insured to the best poetry by the instinct of self-preservation in humanity." And over against the names of Jane Austen, Scott—who in his large views of life belongs also to the class of the prophets—the Brontës, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, and the moderns about whom we are still arguing and questioning, brilliant as these are, must be placed the names and influence of the poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, Arnold, and the prophets Carlyle, Ruskin, Newman, Arnold, and others. We may even place the two Matthew Arnolds and the two Mr. Kiplings against themselves, and it is likely enough that the voice of the poet may outlive that of the critic and the novelist in each respectively.

But after all this has been said, the old century has closed and the new century has opened in a general spirit of novel-writing, and it must be reckoned with. The great possibility of the novel lies in its claim to portray life; its weakness is in its too ready compliance with every popular impulse. Almost any message can be heard. Indeed, in the hands of some of its advocates, it has almost ceased to be regarded primarily as an art form, and is become a medium for propaganda. And too often the "propaganda" thinly cloaks the "proper goose." There is only one more step for our enterprising age: some commercial house will yet send forth a long novel or a volume of short stories, deeply symbolical or highly mystical it

may be, wherein we shall be urged to use Pears' Soap or to take Hood's Sarsaparilla. Indeed, have we not already come to that in the attractive advertising sheets appended to our monthly periodicals, often made as fascinating as the pages of contents which are stitched between? And are we far from this in a work like Zola's "Fecundity," the perusal of which might possibly have suggested to the President of our own country his advocacy of the blessings of large families had he not committed himself to it long ago? But if the novel has been thus fitful in its many forms and schools, and if its laws have never been very clearly defined, and we hardly know what new directions it may take, at least its course in history may be mapped out, its tendencies discerned, and a prophecy be made for its future coincident with the life it portrays.

Side by side with Miss Austen's delicate mosaics of English genteel country life in the early century was the "big bowwow" style of Sir Walter Scott, as the Wizard of the North, humorously and exaggeratedly described his own work. The popularity of the Waverley Novels was one of the phenomena in literary history, and remains so. But although in the rich color of mere romance, in the portrayal of the chivalrous Middle Ages and the Crusades, in the exactness or nicety of historic knowledge and setting, Scott may have been or may be overtaken, as, for example, in certain points of Mr. Maurice Hewlett's "Richard Yea-and-Nay"; yet in the knowledge of Scotland, Scotch scenery, Scotch manners, Scotch traditions, Scotch human nature, and all that goes to make up national life and character, that is Scott's realm where he is crowned king not to be usurped by any school or novelist to come. In his own kingdom Scott is removed from the "isms" of literature and, despite all dicta to the contrary, is among the immortals.

As the great name of Scott began the nineteenth century, so, after a period of neglect and even of reproach, the close of the century found a return to Scott in the many editions of the master and in the clearer recognition of his worth. In France he taught Victor Hugo and Dumas, "the great Alexander," their art, and even Balzac had something to learn from him. And later he has been directly or indirectly the inspiration of

the German Prof. George Ebers in Egyptian romances; of Jokai in Hungary; of the author of "Quo Vadis," with the unpronounceable name in Poland; of Stevenson in his own Scotch land and among the South Sea Islands; and possibly even, in some measure, of Mr. Kipling in India. It would be impossible to state in precise terms what the century does owe to Scott's manliness, sanity, and sound healthfulness.

The lively humanitarian spirit and moral reforms of the nineteenth century found their first strong impulse in the novel in Charles Dickens's succession of stories for a purpose, often saved from becoming tracts or being sensational only by the author's inimitable humor and unrivaled knowledge of fundamental human nature in certain phases of life. These two things are Dickens's own, and Dickens lives for us because we have to go to him if we hope to get just his particular relation to these things.

The great man of letters in the nineteenth century British novel, Thackeray, gave this novel of manners a deeper significance and a loftier artistic aim. Somewhat corresponding to Balzac's "Human Comedy" for Paris and for French manners, the English Thackeray portrayed the Vanity Fair of London life; and the characters we have met in his pages, Becky Sharp, Rawdon Crawley, Lord Steyne, Jos. Sedley, Pen and Laura, Capt. Costigan, Col. Newcome, and Clive, we feel have lived.

In George Eliot's work the woman's soul brooded over the illusion and disillusion of life which found relentless expression in the characterization of Dorothea Brooke and Dr. Lydgate in "Middlemarch," and the psychological novel of character and analysis of motive was at length born for the English-speaking world. Mr. George Meredith and Mr. Thomas Hardy—who at first went over to the local school—though independent and more influenced by continental examples, have worked in similar paths. Since then—and it has been the period of the last quarter of a century and belongs to our own day—English fiction has been divided into two sharp schools. The dividing line has almost seemed to be geographical and national. In Southern England fiction followed in the wake of the Warwick-

shire woman, the analyst George Eliot. Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray were all discarded as hopelessly out of date and weakly sentimental. Mr. George Meredith's "Ordeal of Richard Ferval" and his latest works show how terribly in earnest is this portrayer of destiny in the lives and relations of man and woman. Mr. Thomas Hardy brought all the powers of his splendid rhetoric and art upon the delineation of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, who, he maintained, was "a pure woman faithfully portrayed." There was no capitulating with these gentlemen. This doctrine of inheritance and outside environment determining character, this promulgation of the fatalistic bearing of fact and circumstance upon life was strong, powerful, complete, and hopeless! It was not in England alone, and the movement had not begun in England. It was with Zola in France, Tolstoy in Russia, and in the dramas of Ibsen in Scandinavia, and the young Hauptmann in Germany. How they lay bare the structure of society, digging the earth away even from beneath the foundations to see what might be hidden! It has been an inevitable step possibly in the acute scientific and sociological development the world had entered upon in its interest in all problems of human life and social relations. In America we have had no writer and no artist who has dared to do the same thing so frankly. Mr. Howells, true, who occupies a leading place in American letters, has given us the method in his multiplicity of detail; but he has never pushed forward to the same logical results the terrible disenchantment and inexorable fatalism of his European models. He has been a lesser imitator of Balzac in phases of Boston and New York life as Mr. Brander Matthews is in his pictures of New York society.

But in striking contrast with this movement, Scotland, perhaps farther removed from continental influence, still proved true to the traditions of Walter Scott. North of the Tweed Robert Louis Stevenson still invoked the genius of romance, and believed that a good story with a plot possessing a thorough-paced villain was still worth telling, provided it was endowed with a style of distinction. Other Scotch writers likewise lingered on the romantic and gentler side of Scottish life,

in depicting manners and character. The sudden protest against naturalism and fatalism—the materialism of circumstance and fact—in British literature first made itself distinctly felt from Scotland. It came spontaneously and simultaneously from a group of writers born of Scotch and native, and not foreign, traditions. There was first of all Stevenson, who, passing to America and the islands of the Pacific, ultimately belonged to no race and country and climate, but to an altruistic brotherhood of man. And at the moment when the influence of the searching psychology and analysis of Mr. Meredith and Mr. Hardy was reaching its height, there sprang up out of the rugged Scotch soil the more sentimental portrayals of Scotch life—Ian Maclaren's "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush" and Mr. Barrie's "A Window in Thrums," "The Little Minister," and "Sentimental Tommy"—though latterly Mr. Barrie has gone over to the enemy with his transplanting from "Thrums" to London.

The same reaction was noticeable not only in Scotland but in England as well. Fresh enthusiasm was aroused by "The Prisoner of Zenda" stories of Mr. Anthony Hope Hawkins, and the mysterious detective unravelings of Mr. Sherlock Holmes *alias* Sir Conan Doyle. Men had the courage again to confess that they enjoyed the very unreality and "unnaturalness," if you please, of these tales.

Certainly the two most marked influences upon the younger group of writers seem to be Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Kipling, with their stories of South Sea adventure and Indian soldier life. Both prepared, in a measure unconsciously, America for her Eastern and Asiatic experiences and England for her South African difficulties. In their stories, both Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Kipling represent vigor and action as opposed to the other significant contemporary method—the calm introspection of Mrs. Humphry Ward and the subtle refinement of Mr. Henry James. Listening so long to the practitioners of the analytic school, often shuddering as they revealed to our sight evidences of corruption in the body social, an experience, no doubt, necessary and which did all of us who were thinking beings good, how refreshing, for a change, to burst forth again from the close

chamber of invalidism and the stuffy room of dissection into the fresh air of Mr. Kipling's Mulvaney stories and the *Jungle Books*. What a difference! From Mr. Meredith to Mr. Kipling at one bound! Here was virility—some thought, as with modern athletics, too much so—and, if you please, something of Scott's large manner again. I know we had been told that Scott was hopelessly old-fashioned, that all the stories had been told, that one of Miss Austen's precise characterizations of English country life was worth all the *Waverley Novels* stacked together. It was possibly our woman readers who had something to do with this; for women after all have nerves, and also are the inveterate novel readers, and novels seem usually written not only about them but ultimately for them. But Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Kipling were exceptions here again. In their characteristic work neither cares for the woman character or thinks of the woman reader. It was hardy adventure and the masculine life that they portrayed.

The comparative rejection of the naturalistic novel with the people; its persistence with its partisans, and with closer students of life and its relations with the modern objective scientific spirit of investigation; and the contemporary existence of the two tendencies side by side—such has been the interesting spectacle as the one century has drawn to a close and a new one has begun. We are said to live in a material and mechanical age, yet no power of money or machinery in these late years has been able to change and affect sentiment and the attitude of the human race as the aggregate of these works. It is but another illustration of the eternal truth—that power over mind and thought and feeling—that which moves nations, incites men, and controls action in crises, is seldom the material.

These are signs of the times. However extreme the analysis and psychology and naturalism of Zola and Tolstoy and Ibsen, and Thomas Hardy in his latest work, they have been based upon the desire to get at the end of being, "the truth of things as they are." There were many ways traversed, but these writers have been terribly in earnest. We cannot doubt their utter sincerity even when we shudder and cannot follow. They

were not playing; they were not wanton—at least the best of them not, and none of them in his best moments—however terrible and appalling the details and episodes may sometimes become. These writers, with M. Zola at their head, assert that they are moralists and reformers, and it is now getting to be generally understood that they are. The publication of the famous “I accuse” letter of M. Zola in the Dreyfus trial may almost be said to have revolutionized general sentiment in Zola’s favor. These writers have been among the literary forces that are tending to make the twentieth century more socially democratic, more humanitarian, more keenly alive to the presence of injustice and sham, and more capably and intelligently solicitous of the ills and consequent welfare of the race. The enduring part of this fiction at the close of the nineteenth century, the trend of the literature that will survive and is not a mere memoir to serve, it seems reasonable to maintain, has thus been spiritual in its final utterance—awakening, expanding, developing, and in the end uplifting.

JOHN BELL HENNEMAN.

Sewanee.